



SPARE US: Not pictured is one of my many errors of sartorial taste, the Joan Collins *Dynasty*-style two-piece, worn (of necessity) over an all-in-one industrial-strength undergarment with a zip that malfunctioned in embarrassing circumstances

Slim chance of fitting into outfits I wore at 21

DESPITE inexorably advancing age, fluctuating weight and a succession of replacement hip joints that have robbed me of two inches in height and put the kibosh on ever wearing high heels again, I'm still a dedicated follower of fashion – so I read with interest and a fair degree of apprehension an article entitled, 'Can you fit into the clothes you wore at 21?' The short answer is "No," but that would leave this column several hundred words short, so I shall persevere.

Alas, the only means of keeping one's figure in later life is a spartan diet and exercise, exercise and more exercise. From adolescence, all forms of sport have been anathema to me. I work on the principle, 'if you're no good at it, don't do it' – a rule I've adhered to in all aspects of my life. In my defence, I never sat down when I was teaching but I've rarely got up since I retired. Together the Loving Spouse and I grew plump with contentment, until he started worrying about himself and proposed a daily walk. "Away you go," I said. "It would mean a lot if you'd come with me," he said. And so it transpired, in matching quilted jackets, me trailing sullenly in his wake and the wrong shoes. Friends hooted in derisory disbelief. Hungry as hunters we'd return, he'd collapse in front of the telly while I prepared carbohydrate-laden dinners, instantly replacing the calories we'd used up pounding the roads. I lost not an ounce. Once the weather turned, we gave up.

Regular readers will know that I have kept most of my clothes from graduation onwards. For the purposes of research on your behalf, I ascended to the roof-space to test the hypothesis

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so forcefully put, viz. 'Your waist size should be the same as when you were 21'. Hah! For women, many factors militate against having a slim waist. These, in no particular order of blame, are the combined forces of larger portions, frequent snacking (cheese, chocolate, red wine, crisps, nuts), sedentary habits, idleness, having a baby and heredity – only some of which are optional. Truth to tell, I was never really a size 10 for long, except brief periods of mourning broken romances or starvation dieting for a Big Occasion, but there was the green velvet maxi-dress I'd worn to a Rugby Club hop where a fight broke out and somebody bled on me. Moving swiftly on... on another rail, one of my many errors

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Here's a riotously-patterned flouncy Laura Ashley number that would've better served as bedroom curtains and a navy pinstriped wide-legged trouser suit that made me look like a Chicago gangster's moll. No mini-length garments survive, but in my first teaching post, I was called to the principal's office to be reprimanded for the shortness of my skirts.

As an avid reader of fashion magazines, I note that style editors, anxious to manifest their 'green' credentials, brag about wearing their own 'vintage' garments to current designer shows. (Obviously, they still fit.) Apparently 'retro' is a big thing now. Currently a size 14, I brought down an armful of my old 14s to try on. What a blow to the self-esteem. Technically they fit, but not flatteringly. It's as if all my bones and bits have re-arranged themselves. I'm the same size, but two inches shorter. As for a waist dimension, I don't remember what it was at 21 and I don't want

to know what it is now. The unpalatable truth is, weight loss starts from the top down, unless you're a celebrity addicted to 'tweakments'.

After a certain age, you can have either your face or your figure. There's no point in having model proportions topped by time-worn haggard features. That's my theory anyhow.

Hold your shoulders back, your stomach in and cut the size label out of your clothes. G'won! Have another biscuit.

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 19 1921

Craig Holds Key

THE Press Association learned yesterday that Sir James Craig will not be approached until the London Conference is brought up against the crucial question of a united Ireland. The Belfast correspondent of the [London] Evening News wires: 'The Ulster Volunteers are busily drilling and arming. As a result of their feverish activity, the North is now being made ready for any eventuality. Colonel Spender, the secretary of the Ulster Cabinet, is commandant of the Volunteers... The Volunteers will be well armed, as they have kept their rifles since 1914.'

The Manchester Guardian says: 'It is sometimes forgotten that there is a third party to be considered in any effective settlement – that the Irish minority or "Northern Ireland", as by Act of Parliament constituted, cannot be left out of consideration. An effort at least must be made to secure the cooperation of Ulster in any settlement. There can be a settlement which ignores Ulster and leaves the six – or would it be only four? – Northern counties...'

'Sir James Craig's speech [rejecting any loss of territory], militant as it is, does not cause great anxiety in London for the facts constitute an overwhelming argument for a settlement. Sooner or later Ulster must come to terms with the rest of Ireland... For the six counties cannot remain 'six' if the leaders decide to remain in hostile isolation. It would clearly be impossible to insist, as [Britain] have insisted, on the democratic methods of plebiscites in a settlement of such questions on the continent and then refuse it in Ireland... For there is nothing sacrosanct about the boundaries of the six counties state. It is a purely artificial unit made by excluding three [overwhelmingly Nationalist] Ulster counties. It may well be, therefore, that the six counties state will have before it the choice of coming into the Irish state as a unit or of taking the reduction to four counties. It is no secret that [Ulster] could now enter the Irish state on the most favourable terms.'

AS THE London conference moved to address partition in late October 1921 it was felt that Craig held the key to a settlement. Like Sinn Féin, the British Liberal press viewed the six counties won by unionism in 1920 as a purely 'artificial unit' created to ensure a permanent Protestant majority. Collins and Griffith argued that the only alternative to Craig's acceptance of a federal Irish state ('essential unity') would be the loss of Fermanagh, Tyrone, Derry and other nationalist areas. However, Craig knew that Bonar Law and the Tories stood full-square behind Unionism and began remobilising the 1913 UVF.

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